

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-07 INR-10 L-03 NEA-10

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SECDEF WASHDC

INFO DIA WASHDC

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AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USNMR SHAPE

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CINCUSAREUR

CINCUSAFE

CINCUSNAVEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 5341

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, BE

SUBJECT: BELGIAN DEFENSE REFORMS

REF: BRUSSELS 5168, 5263 AND 5265

1. ACCORDING TO RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS IN FOREIGN AND DEFENSE
MINISTERIES, BELGIAN PLAN TO REDUCE TERM OF CONSCRIPT SERVICE TO
SIX MONTHS WHILE RECRUITING SHORT-TERM VOLUNTEERS TO PERFORM
OPERATIONAL TASKS CAN ONLY WORK TO THE BENEFIT OF NATO AND ALLIED
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DEFENSE. AS ONE OFFICIAL PUT IT, NATO WILL GAIN QUALITATIVELY

WITH NOT QUANTITATIVE LOSS IN SO FAR AS BELGIAN FORCES ARE CONCERNED.

2. SOURCES EXPLAINED THAT TERM OF CONSCRIPT SERVICE WILL BE REDUCED ONLY TO THE EXTENT THAT THE RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS IS PROCEEDING SATISFACTORILY. IF IN ANY ONE YEAR THE NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IS INSUFFICIENT, THERE WILL BE A CORRESPONDING DELAY IN ANY FURTHER REDUCTION IN CONSCRIPT SERVICE TERM. IN SHORT, SOURCES TELL US THAT THE BELGIAN PLAN WILL BE FLEXIBLE ENOUGH IN ITS IMPLEMENTATION TO AVOID THE POSSIBILITY OF ANY DIMINUTION OF BELGIAN FORCE STRENGTH OR LEVELS AT ANY STAGE DURING THE FIVE-YEAR, PHASED PROGRAM. DEFENSE SOURCES ARE CONFIDENT, HOWEVER, THAT RECRUITMENT GOALS WILL BE ACHIEVED.

3. WHILE SOURCES RECOGNIZE THE POSSIBILITY THAT A DISAPPROPORTIONATE NUMBER OF PERSONS FROM DEPRESSED AREAS IN WALLONIA MIGHT FLOOD THE VOLUNTEER LISTS, THEY SAY THAT ANY IMBALANCE BETWEEN LINGUISTIC GROUPS WILL BE AVERTED EITHER BECAUSE OF THE LARGER FLEMISH POPULATION OR, IF NECESSARY, BY THE IMPOSITION OF LINGUISTIC QUOTAS.

4. DEFENSE MINISTRY OFFICIAL PREDICTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO SUBMIT A DRAFT LAW TO PARLIAMENT BEFORE LATE DECEMBER 1973, GIVEN THE NECESSITY FOR PRIOR EXAMINATION AND APPROVAL BY THE APPROPRIATE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES AND THE COUNCIL OF STATE. SOURCES EXPECTED NO SIGNIFICANT OPPOSITION FROM WITHIN THE THREE COALITION PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT, SINCE LEADERS OF ALL THREE PARTIES HAVE ALREADY APPROVED THE PLAN.

5. IN VIEW OF THE PLAN'S IMPACT ON BELGIUM'S FORCE STRUCTURE AS OUTLINED IN PARAGRAPH 2 ABOVE, SOURCES EXPECT NO DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING ALLIED APPROVAL OF THE PLAN. BELGIAN PERMREP DE STAERCKE SENT A LETTER DESCRIBING THE BELGIAN PROPOSAL TO SYG LUNS WITHIN THE PAST FEW DAYS, AND THE BELGIANS ARE NOW LEAVING THE NEXT STEP UP TO LUNS. MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE VANDEN BOEYNANTS INTENDS TO DESCRIBE THE BELGIAN PLAN AT THE DECEMBER DPC MEETING. IN SHORT, THE BELGIANS ARE QUITE RELAXED ABOUT THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS, FEEL THEY HAVE TAKEN THE NECESSARY FIRST STEP, AND DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE PROCESS NEED BE ANY MORE COMPLICATED THAN THAT FOLLOWED BY THE US

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WHEN IT INFORMED NATO OF ITS PLAN TO DO AWAY WITH THE DRAFT.
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